

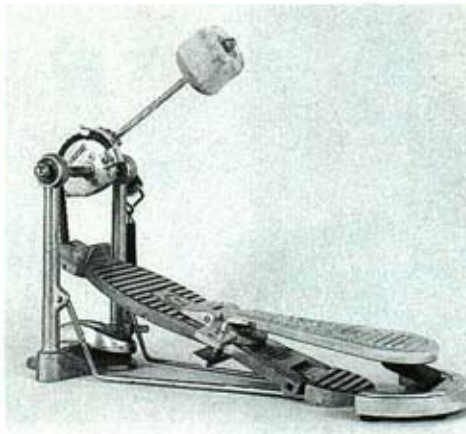
crease in low end and resonance from the bass drum. Drummers who like to "play into" their drumheads and so wouldn't want their beaters to flex could simply disengage the Acoustic Simulator; they would still have the option to use it if they happened to play an electronic kick drum. And for those who would have absolutely no use for such a feature, a lower-priced version of the *Black Max* is available without it.

Another unique feature of the *Black Max* is its Backcheck. Originally, this was a non-adjustable lobe used to stop the motion of the driveshaft (and the swingback of the beater) upon the pedal's return. I found that this device stopped the return of the beater in such an abrupt way that it interfered with my footwork on the pedal. Like most drummers (I believe), I rely on the return action of the beater to put the footboard in the right place for my next downstroke. The timing of my footwork is based on this. When the first couple of *Black Max* versions didn't return in the manner I was familiar with, I couldn't get any quickness from them; they seemed slow and heavy in their action. Luke must have received this same response from several other drummers from whom he was gathering input, because he came up with a way to overcome the problem. The new version incorporates a spring (separate from the pedal's drive spring) that still *controls* the return of the beater, but does not stop it abruptly. With this adaptation, I found the pedal much more natural and comfortable to play. It may be that the earlier version was more mechanically efficient in theory, but sometimes a designer has to adapt theory to suit the idiosyncrasies of the consumer. The newer version of the *Black Max* has done just that, and it now feels wonderful to use. (For the sake of clarification, I should point out that our photo shows one of the earlier versions; all current models will incorporate the new return feature.)

I can't say that the *Black Max* is the perfect bass drum pedal; there are just too many drummers out there who demand different things from their pedals for any one product to be perfect. But I can say that the *Black Max* is the most versatile, adjustable, and user-friendly pedal I've come across. It's a bit big and awkward to carry, and it will exasperate you for a while until you master the subtleties of its adjustments. But once you've gotten everything tweaked just the way you like it, I think you'll have a friend for life. Owing to the last-minute design changes I mentioned, list pricing for the *Black Max* had not been established as we went to press. However, by the time you read this, the pedal should be available at your local retail drum shop. In the meantime, you can get more information directly from XL Specialty Percussion, P.O. Box 8304, Ft. Wayne, Indiana 46898.

—Rick Van Horn

The Vruk



For years, I've been wondering why someone hasn't developed a bass drum pedal you can play with your heel as well as your toes. (If you're like me, you've probably noticed that you can do certain things faster and more accurately with your heel.) Recently, to my surprise, I came across a unique new invention from England called the *Vruk* that comes very close to that concept.

The *Vruk* is an add-on heel plate that attaches to any normal bass drum pedal about two-thirds of the way down the footplate, with no modification needed. A bent steel spring underneath this heel plate enables the player to depress the pedal with a heel action, thus transferring force towards the beater and striking the drum. Normal playing with the front of the foot is not affected. This facilitates a heel-to-toe technique that makes playing doubles, triplets, or merely faster bass drum patterns very easy. There is a trade-off, though, in that a slight adjustment in your playing technique might be necessary to employ the heel-to-toe method. If you already play in this manner, the *Vruk* will be easier to master.

The *Vruk* was invented by Vuk Vukovic, a 31-year-old Yugoslavian drummer currently living in England. At the age of 16, Vuk was playing Bulgarian and Macedonian folk music with a Yugoslavian band that incorporated many odd time signatures into their music. Normally, the rhythmic patterns are played on the snare drum, but he tried to split them between bass drum and snare. Some parts of the music were very fast, and it was not possible for him to play the pedal that quickly. One day—while watching an old movie with Fred Astaire doing his marvelous tap-dancing—Vuk came up with the main principle of the *Vruk*. Lack of funds put the idea to rest for a while, but later, after developing various prototypes, Vuk found a partner in engi-

neer James Reed. The first finished *Vruk* came out of the die in late 1988.

Vuk sent me one of his models to try, along with a demonstration video of himself using the *Vruk* in a drumkit application. Vuk's demo was on a twin-bass kit, with *Vruks* attached to both pedals. The result was accurate *double-stroke rolls* on the two bass drums—a feat that could *never* be accomplished in the normal manner.

A bit of practicing is required with the *Vruk* in order to get used to the minor technique change needed. Vuk told me that to get to the level demonstrated on the video took him five months. Therefore, the possibilities with the *Vruk* depend solely upon the drummer's initiative to work with it. I've had the *Vruk* with me for a few months, and am beginning to get it down with only intermittent practice. From watching the video, and working on the technique myself, I've found that the *Vruk* allows double-bass-drum effects to be played on one bass drum quite easily. The *Vruk* is not a shortcut to faster playing, but rather an aid to inducing faster patterns with less strain. (The *Vruk* can also be attached to a hi-hat pedal, and will work in the same manner as on a bass drum pedal.)

The *Vruk* has patent applications in several countries, and is currently available in English drum shops. A U.S. distributor is currently being sought. The unit is available in aluminum finish or in black at retail prices of £40 and £44, respectively (approximately \$72 and \$79 U.S.). All told, the *Vruk* is a relatively inexpensive drum pedal accessory that opens up a wealth of possibilities for drummers to create new and interesting rhythmic patterns on the drumkit. Vuk Vukovic has invented a totally new product, and I hope someone in the U.S. picks up on the *Vruk* to unleash upon American drummers. For more information, contact Vruk International Ltd., 112 Longhill Road, Catford, London, SE6 1UA, England.

—Bob Saydlowski, Jr.
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